

# Duluth Commercial Historic District Draft Design Guidelines

**Public Information Presentation, July 27 and July 28, 2021**



# Presentation Overview

1. The unique importance of Duluth's historic district
2. Purpose of the design guidelines, major elements:
  - Maintenance of existing structures
  - New structures
  - Demolition of existing structures
3. Public review process and timeline

## **Next Steps**

August and Early Sep

More Review at Heritage Preservation Commission

Late September

Additional Public Information Meetings  
(Mailed Notices and Press Release)

October/November

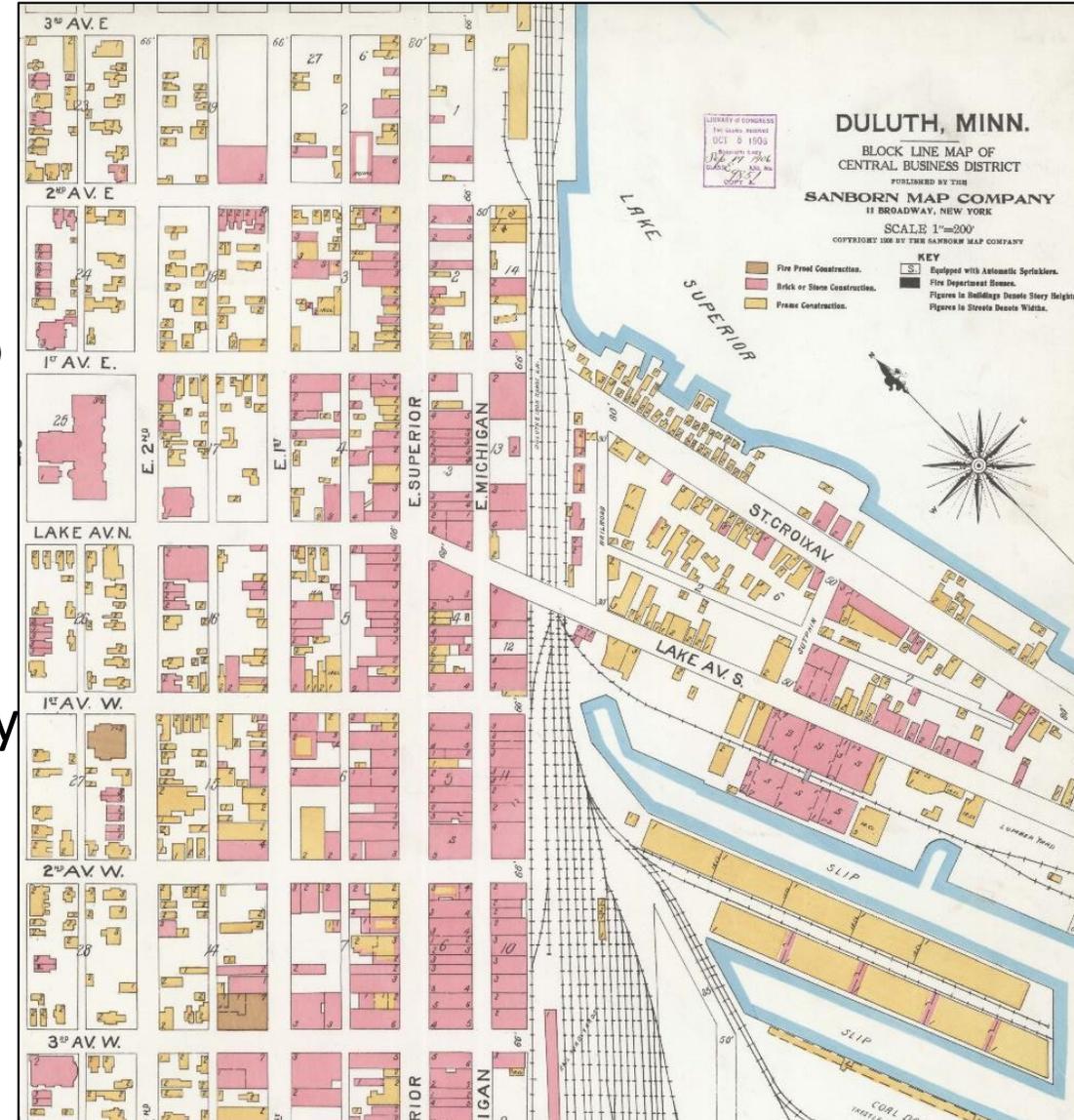
Heritage Preservation Commission and Planning Commission Public Hearing, and Review and Comment by State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

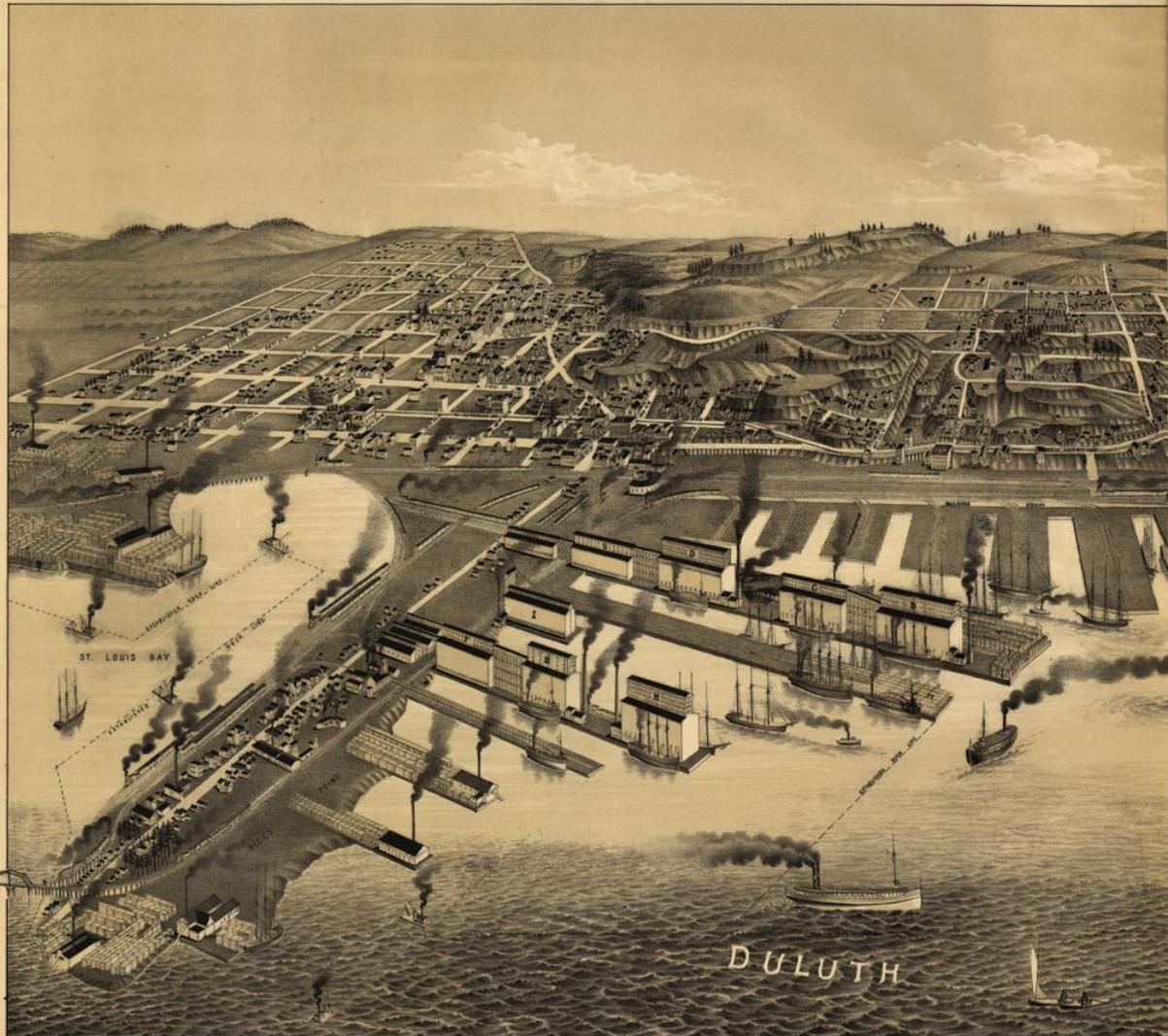
Late 2021/Early 2022

City Council

# The Unique Character of Historic Downtown

Duluth's commercial district was established downtown near the Lake Superior waterfront in the early 1870s, after the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad reached Duluth in 1870. Duluth's location at the western end of Lake Superior and its proximity to three key natural resources — **lumber, wheat, and iron ore** — helped establish the city as one of the nation's major timber processing centers from the 1880s to the 1920s, and as a significant grain and ore shipping port from the 1880s and 1900s into the early twentieth century. By that time, Duluth was well known as northern Minnesota's economic, social, political, and cultural hub. The **booming town's prosperity was reflected in the bustling commercial district on Superior Street, 1st Street, Michigan Street, and the avenues bisecting these streets.**





PERSPECTIVE MAP OF  
**DULUTH, MINN.**

1887.  
 POPULATION 35,000.  
 (1880 POP. 3400.)

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Drawn by A. WELLS 208 SECOND ST. MINNEAPOLIS WIS.  
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Drawn by H. WELLS

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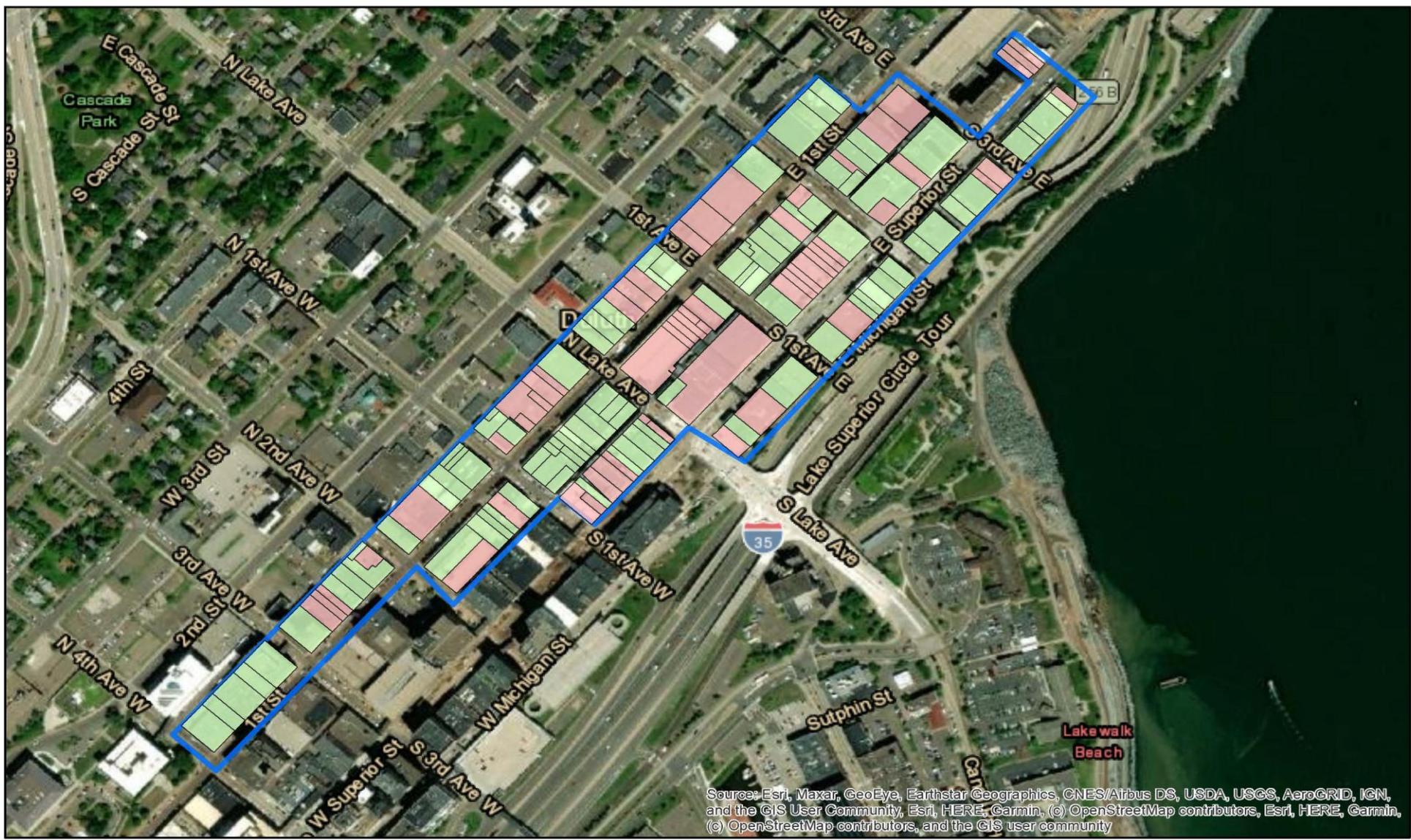
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# Duluth Commercial Historic District District Map



## Legend

-  Historic District Boundary
-  Noncontributing Property
-  Contributing Property



# What is the Value of Historic Preservation

Maintaining a neighborhood's historic character has social, economic, and environmental benefits beyond achieving and preserving a particular aesthetic appearance. **Historic buildings are constructed using workmanship and materials which are often superior to new construction**, including old growth lumber and forgotten techniques.

They typically have a longer lifespan (100+ years) when compared to new construction (30-40 years on average).

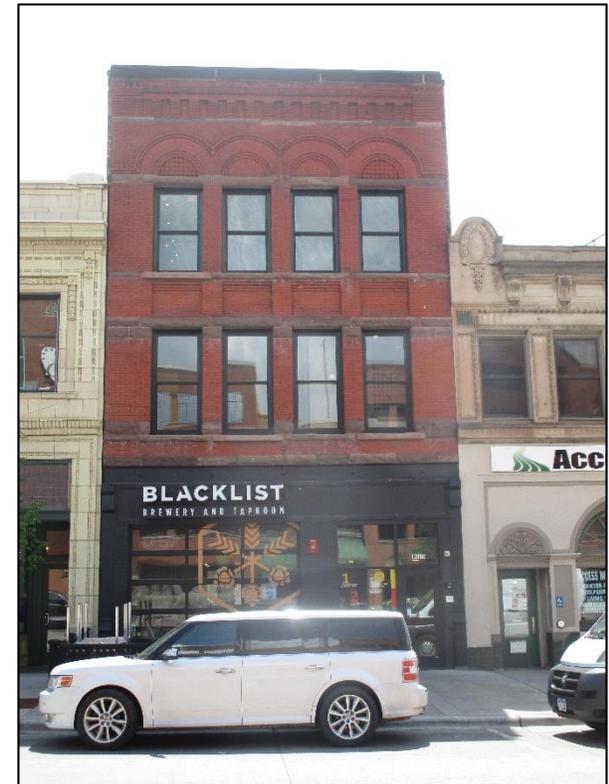
**Well-preserved historic character can attract visitors and investment to the area**, differentiating it from communities filled with new construction, which tend to lack “personality” or individual distinction.



# What is the Value of Historic Preservation

**Making use of existing buildings and infrastructure to the greatest extent possible is environmentally sustainable.** Waste materials from demolition and construction projects comprise approximately 25% of the waste in our nation's landfills.

Demolishing a historic building that could otherwise be utilized for a productive purpose wastes a significant amount of energy, while replacing it with new construction, often utilizing inferior materials, wastes even more.



# What is the Value of Historic Preservation

**Rehabilitation projects provide more local jobs as compared to new construction**, as a larger percentage of the project cost is for labor. Multiple studies have shown consistently that communities with revitalized historic neighborhoods have higher property values which are also stabilized over time.



# Reason for the Guidelines

In 2006 this area was recognized by the National Park Service as a Historic District (06-000455).

In 2020 the City received a grant to create design guidelines to help in the maintenance of existing historic structures in the district. The guidelines are only applicable to the properties within this specific district.

NPS Form 10-900-a  
(Rev. 8-98)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of property  
Historic Resources of Downtown Duluth, Minnesota, 1872-1993

County and State

Section  E  Page  1  St. Louis County Minnesota

### STATEMENT OF HISTORIC CONTEXTS

The Historic Resources of Downtown Duluth, Minnesota, 1872-1933 Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) consists of a variety of commercial, social, and recreational buildings located in the central business district of Duluth, a city with a population of approximately 86,000 in northeastern Minnesota on the west end of Lake Superior. Duluth developed as a result of having a natural, protected harbor that proved to be a strategic advantage for the transshipment of wheat, lumber, coal, iron ore, and other goods across the Great Lakes. A framework for understanding how these forces affected the early evolution of Duluth's commercial district is provided by the statewide historic contexts "Railroads and Agricultural Development (1870-1940)," "Northern Minnesota Lumbering (1870-1930s)," "Minnesota's Iron Ore Industry (1880s-1945)," and "Urban Centers (1870-1940)," as well as by the local historic contexts prepared for the Duluth Heritage Preservation Commission in 1981.

The multiple property group for Duluth includes two historic districts—the Duluth Commercial Historic District and the West Superior Street Historic District—that contain the greatest concentration of buildings related to commercial development within the city. These buildings were identified through an intensive level survey that was conducted by the City of Duluth Planning Department in 1994 and expanded by the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office in 2004. Additional sites representing the same historic contexts and located within the MPDF boundary of downtown Duluth may be nominated to the National Register in the future.

### LAKE SUPERIOR: THE UNSALTED SEA

Duluth has been called the "San Francisco of the Midwest," because, like San Francisco, it is defined by its embrace of the water. The presence of Lake Superior is assertive, even when it is out of sight. The lake steamers, the ship canal, and the Aerial Lift Bridge seem always there, even when one cannot see them. The light in the city changes with banks of clouds or fog, and it is nearly always "cooler by the lake."<sup>1</sup>

More than three billion tons of iron ore, along with millions of tons of grain, lumber, fish, coal, and other products have passed through the Duluth-Superior harbor since the beginning of Minnesota's great Iron Age. Protected by what may be the longest fresh-water bay mouth bar in the world, the harbor was for much of the twentieth century second in total tonnage only to New York City among U.S. ports, even though it was open to shipping only about eight months a year.

Lake Superior is the largest fresh-water lake by area in the world. The rock that makes up its basin and is visible along the North Shore and within the city of Duluth, is perhaps a billion years old, but the events that created the harbor happened relatively recently in geological time. Six hundred million years ago the earth's crust folded or

# Purpose of the Design Guidelines

The guidelines are intended to **provide guidance for possible solutions to common issues in preserving historic buildings.**

The guidelines will contain the procedures, standards, and guidance necessary to ensure proper preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of historic structures within the Duluth Commercial Historic District, as well as to ensure that new construction and additions are compatible with the historic character of their surroundings.

The guidelines serve as the primary **resource for property owners** conducting any alteration, rehabilitation, or restoration on buildings within the Duluth Commercial Historic District. In addition, they provide a guide for the HPC to use when reviewing alterations to any historic structures or properties.

# Purpose of the Design Guidelines

The guidelines are based on the guidance outlined by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, a set of overarching guidelines developed by the National Park Service which set forth standards of treatment when rehabilitating or altering historic properties.



# Purpose of the Design Guidelines

These guidelines are based on the overarching guidance provided by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. **The standards are broad**, as they are designed to apply to the rehabilitation of historic properties throughout the United States.

#2 The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

#4 Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

#10 New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

# Maintenance of Existing Structures

**Preserve Significant Historic Features.** Each architectural style has a distinctive set of details that contribute to the overall character of the building. These features should be preserved.

**Repair Rather than Replace.** Wherever possible, deteriorated historic features should be repaired rather than replaced.

**Restore Significant Historic Features.** When possible and where historic documentation exists, it is appropriate to restore historic features to their historic appearance.

**Make Sensitive Replacements** When a historic element is deteriorated to the point that replacement is required, care should be taken to do so without altering its character.

**Prioritize Regular Maintenance.** Avoid changing the character of historic features. For example, original horizontal board siding should not be replaced by vertically oriented siding, even of the same material.

# Maintenance of Existing Structures

**Roof.** The roof is one of the prominent characteristics of a historic building. Historic roof shapes and elements such as chimneys, gables, and dormers are important character defining features.

**Gutters.** Gutters and downspouts play a vital role in the preservation of a building by collecting water from the roof and moving it away from the building. Gutters and downspouts are typically not character-defining features.

**Parapets.** The majority of the buildings in the Duluth Commercial Historic District have low slop or flat roofs with parapets on the façade. These parapets serve a variety of purposes and are often character defining features of commercial structures.



# Maintenance of Existing Structures

**Walls.** Most wall surfaces in the Duluth Commercial Historic District are unpainted stone or brick. Examples of other surface types, are also present, including stucco, painted brick, and a number of siding and cladding types.

**Storefronts.** Storefronts are a character defining element in the Commercial Historic District. Storefronts typically have one primary customer entrance with one or more secondary entrances on the front, side, or rear elevations.

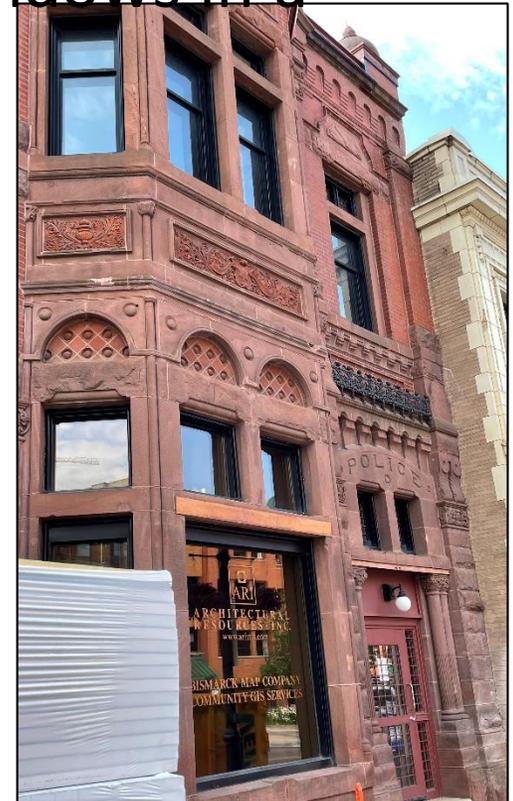


# Maintenance of Existing Structures

**Doors.** Many historic buildings feature doors that stylistically complement the exterior detailing of the building. The original door with its frame and trim should be preserved.

**Windows.** Windows are one of the most significant architectural features on a historic building. The arrangement (fenestration) and type of windows in a historic building conveys the building's original function.

**Decorative Architectural Features.** Decorative architectural features are often character defining elements of historic buildings that help define a buildings style. Common decorative architectural features within the Duluth Commercial Historic District include cast-iron storefronts, sheet metal or wood cornices with brackets or dentils, brick corbels and molded brickwork, terra cotta details, and decorative tile entryways.



# Maintenance of Existing Structures

**Awnings.** Awnings can either add or detract to the character of the Commercial Historic District depending on their design and use.

**Paint and Color.** In addition to contributing to a building's aesthetic appearance, paint can play a role in the durability of building materials. A building's color scheme, which is determined by paint choice and the natural colors of other materials such as brick, terracotta, and stone, has a big impact on its overall appearance.

**Exterior Lighting.** Most historic structures in the Duluth Commercial Historic District feature light fixtures utilized to illuminate entrances and highlight signage. Light fixtures are a component of historic buildings that often changed over time with improvements in technology.



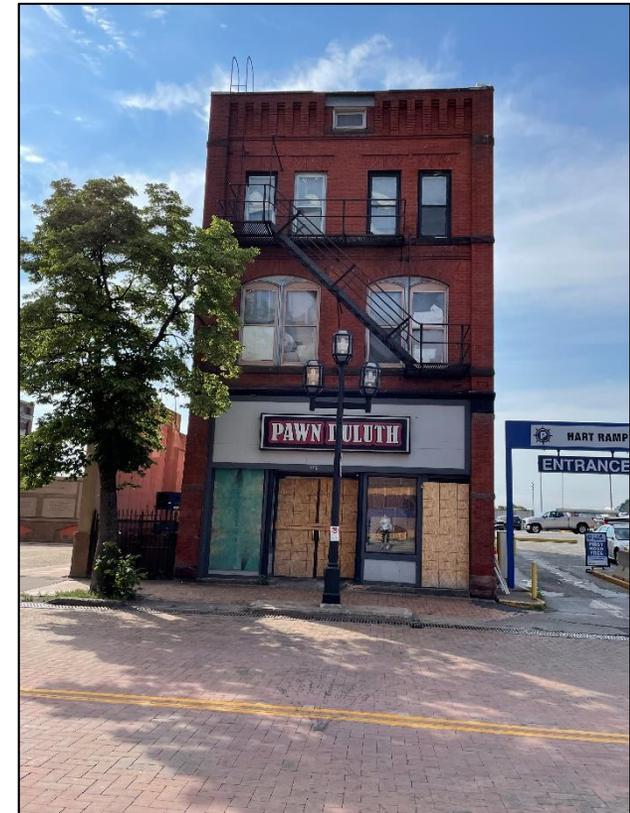
# Maintenance of Existing Structures

**Fire Escapes and Exterior Stairs.** Fire escapes and exterior stairs are commonly added to buildings to create a means of egress to occupants above the first floor, or to create a separate private entrance for a tenant.

**ADA Ramps.** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public buildings and spaces to be accessible for Americans with impaired mobility.

This requirement often necessitates the construction of ramps to allow for access to buildings and structures.

These ramps should be constructed in a way that eliminates or minimizes damage to the historic fabric of a building and does not alter the overall aesthetic of the building.



# Construction of New Structures

To ensure compatibility with contributing historic structures within the district, designs for new buildings should take into account the following:

- Height, scale, orientation, spacing, and site coverage of surrounding buildings.
- Façade proportions, and window patterns of surrounding buildings.
- Size, shape, and proportions of entrances of surrounding buildings.
- Materials, textures color, and architectural details of surrounding buildings.
- Roof forms of surrounding buildings.
- Horizontal or vertical emphasis of surrounding buildings.
- Landscaping, walls, and fences in the surrounding area.

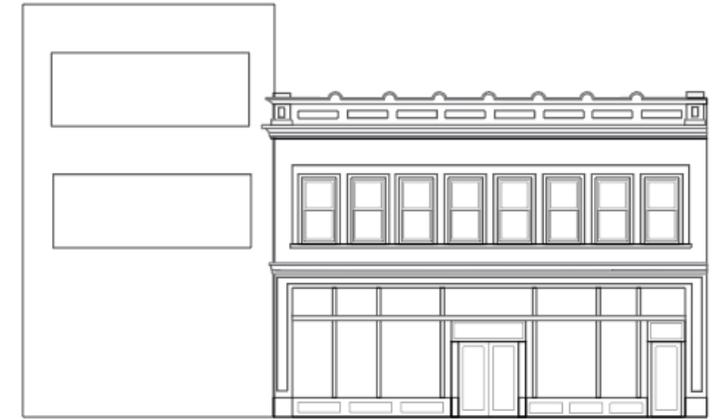
# Construction of New Structures

**Style.** Do not imitate earlier or historic architectural styles.

**Siting.** Site new construction on existing vacant lots whenever possible. New buildings should be oriented to face the street.

**Orientation.** Orient new construction toward the major street. Align new buildings with the setback of surrounding buildings on the street.

**Massing.** Respect the form and massing of adjacent and surrounding historic properties. New buildings should be compatible with surrounding property and generally should occupy the same visual volume.



INAPPROPRIATE  
SCALE AND FENESTRATION



APPROPRIATE  
SCALE AND FENESTRATION

# Construction of New Structures

**Fenestration.** New construction should take design cues from the surrounding buildings.

**Additions.** Additions should be compatible with the massing and scale of the main building. In general, they should be the same or lower height as compared to the surrounding historic buildings.

**Lighting.** Exterior light fixtures should match the character of the building as well as the historic character of the surrounding area in terms of materials, color, finish, scale, size, and design.



# Demolition of Existing Structures

Demolition of a building, whether total or partial, **affects the entirety of the historic district and is not reversable.** The HPC should only approve demolition of historic properties in cases where no feasible or prudent alternative exists. All applications for demolition will be considered on a **case-by-case basis.**

Factors contributing to the decision will include whether or not the structure is of significant architectural or historic value, whether its removal would be to the detriment of the public interest, whether or not the building or structure is of such significance that it would qualify as a National, State, or local historic landmark, whether not the retention of the building would cause undue financial hardship to the owner, and whether or not the retention of the building would be in the best interest of the community.

# Demolition of Existing Structures

- Avoid demolition of sound, contributing buildings, structures, and objects.
- Explore the possibility of adapting historic buildings to a new purpose.
- Consider relocation of significance historic buildings to a new location.
- Demolition may be appropriate if the building poses an immediate hazard to public safety.
- In cases of fire or other catastrophic disaster where at least 50% of the building remains standing, it is recommended that the structurally sound portion be rehabilitated, and the other portions rebuilt.

# Other Topics Addressed in Design Guidelines

Skywalks

Streetscape Elements

Moving Buildings

Alleys

Public Art

Street Furniture, Street Lighting

Substitute Materials



## **Next Steps**

August and Early Sep

More Review at Heritage Preservation Commission

Late September

Additional Public Information Meetings  
(Mailed Notices and Press Release)

October/November

Heritage Preservation Commission and Planning Commission Public Hearing, and Review and Comment by State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

Late 2021/Early 2022

City Council

# QUESTIONS

